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INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 LUSAKA 001303

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Zambian Election Polls: Mwanawasa's Lead Slims, Opposition Candidates Gain

REFS: A) Lusaka 1269; B) Lusaka 1264; C) Lusaka 1183

¶1. (SBU) Summary and introduction: In the final days before national elections, a third Pangolin Consulting poll gives ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy President Levy Mwanawasa the lead, with 43 percent, against 24 percent for Patriotic Front candidate Michael Sata and 23 percent for United Democratic Alliance candidate Hakainde Hichilema. Compared to the second Pangolin poll (Ref B), Mwanawasa has lost some support in almost every province, and his overall level of support dropped as well, by 8 percentage points. Sata's standing rose by 5 percentage points overall, and he gained the most in Northern, Luapula and Central provinces. Hichilema's overall rating rose by 7 points, and he enjoyed large increases in Western, North Western and Southern provinces. The Patriotic Front has reacted to the gains made by Hichilema, and already appears to be preparing for a formal protest of the election results in case its candidate loses. Meanwhile, a second poll by a little-known group with alleged links to the University of Zambia (Ref B) put Sata way ahead with 59 percent, against 23 percent for Mwanawasa and 17 percent for Hichilema. Polling is a new phenomenon in Zambia and it is hard to be certain that any of the cited polls are objective and accurate. End summary and introduction.

Nationwide Results Still Favor Mwanawasa

¶2. (SBU) University of Zambia Political Science Professor Neo Simutanyi announced on September 25 results of a third and final opinion poll, undertaken between September 15 and 19, 2006, in all provinces of Zambia, with 3,000 respondents, using the same survey instrument as in previous polls. The first question asked respondents if they were satisfied with the government's performance at the national level; 51 percent said yes (compared to 58 percent in the second poll) and 45 percent said no (compared to 38 percent in the second poll); 4 percent did not offer an opinion (same level as in the second poll). The lower level of satisfaction may reflect the effectiveness of opposition party campaigns that have attacked the MMD for failing to deliver sufficient housing, health services, and civil servant benefits.

¶3. (SBU) Simutanyi told P/E Officers on September 20 that Sata would not be able to beat Mwanawasa because Sata lacks sufficient support in four provinces: Western, North Western, Eastern, and Southern. He also noted that gains made by UDA candidate Hichilema were coming mainly at Sata's expense. (Note: This contention, however, is not supported by the polling numbers, which show Hichilema's gains coming mainly at Mwanawasa's expense, or from previously undecided voters. End note.) Simutanyi and other political commentators acknowledged that Sata had generated a demand for change among voters. However, they observed that some voters viewed Hichilema as better able to provide change. This perceived threat to Sata from Hichilema was supported by the appearance of pro-Patriotic Front campaign ads during the week of September 18 that proclaimed, "WARNING! ...if you want to guarantee change and a popularly elected president, be warned that a vote against Michael Sata is a vote for Mwanawasa." The commentators noted that Hichilema was viewed favorably and was considered to be a strong prospect for the 2011

presidential race, but that he was too new and even "too clean" to be taken seriously by most voters in the 2006 election.

Provincial Breakdowns

¶4. (SBU) Despite a still-comfortable margin of 43 percent for Mwanawasa to 24 percent for Sata, the final Pangolin poll report notes that the presidential race will be close. It predicts that Sata will win a majority of votes in Lusaka, Copperbelt and Luapula provinces, and Hichilema will win a strong majority in Southern Province and will draw from undecided voters to win in Eastern Province as well. Mwanawasa is expected to win in Western, North Western, Northern and Central provinces--although Sata has made strides in both Northern and Central provinces between August and September polling, and seems to have growing support in Northern Province (see para 8). The results by province for each of the three leading candidates are listed below, together with the results from the previous poll conducted in August (Ref B), in parentheses, to show trends and changes. All values represent percentages.

Central

Mwanawasa: 51 (64); Sata: 26 (19); Hichilema: 13 (7)

Copperbelt

Mwanawasa: 38 (41); Sata: 36 (31); Hichilema: 16 (15)

Eastern

Mwanawasa: 41 (44); Sata: 16 (10); Hichilema: 29 (19)

Luapula

Mwanawasa: 41 (40); Sata: 38 (30); Hichilema: 3 (1)

Lusaka

Mwanawasa: 37 (36); Sata: 35 (32); Hichilema 13 (11)

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Northern

Mwanawasa: 59 (66); Sata 32 (18); Hichilema 2 (5)

North Western

Mwanawasa: 56 (56); Sata 1 (1); Hichilema 31 (24)

Southern

Mwanawasa: 28 (36); Sata 3 (4); Hichilema 63 (45)

Western

Mwanawasa 61 (81); Sata 7 (4); Hichilema 19 (2)

OVERALL

Mwanawasa 43 (51); Sata 24 (19); Hichilema 23 (16)

Protest from PF Already Anticipated

¶5. (SBU) Several political observers and civil society representatives told P/E officers on September 20 that they expected the Patriotic Front to protest election results if Sata is defeated.

The Patriotic Front appears to be laying the foundations for a formal protest: its director of research sent a letter to Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) Chairperson Justice Irene Mambilima raising objections to "Loopholes in the 2006 Electoral Process" and indicating that unless the loopholes "...are sealed forthwith, the Patriotic Front would not recognize a fraudulent electoral outcome."

The letter, dated September 21, 2006, was copied to all diplomatic missions, political parties, election observer delegations, the media, and key civil society groups. It questions the use of the electronic results reporting system, claiming that the system was supplied by a Chinese firm, and that "it is an open secret" that all Chinese favor the MMD government. The letter raises other concerns about alleged "suspicious activities" that accompanied preparations for the 2006 elections, including the printing of voter registers, the collection of voter cards from members of the Zambian military serving in peacekeeping operations in Darfur and from the Zambian police, and alleged "missing" ballots. (Note: Based on regular donor representative discussions with the ECZ, post believes that most of the concerns raised by the PF lack serious merit. End

note.)

Civil Society Concerns Linger

¶ 16. (SBU) Civil society organizations (CSOs) have echoed several concerns raised in a recent meeting that donor missions had with the ECZ Chairperson (Ref A). Representatives of leading CSOs told P/E officers on September 20 that they are concerned about the ECZ's inability to control the abuse of power by traditional leaders--some of whom have beaten and threatened to expel subjects who do not follow their election dictates--and the uneven access to electronic media. While they acknowledged that the MMD government was behaving better than they might have expected, they pointed out that the ruling party still abused its control of resources by announcing strategically-timed projects or provision of benefits, to gain influence with voters. One representative also complained that the ECZ's requirement for full investigation of any complaint of Electoral Code of Conduct violations meant that follow up was extremely slow, and ultimately was not meaningful.

Second Poll from Unknown Group Gives Sata Huge Lead

¶ 17. (SBU) September 25 papers carried reports that the "Network of Social Science Researchers" released results of a second opinion poll that indicated 59 percent of voters favored PF candidate Michael Sata (a previous poll by the same group also gave Sata a strong lead, see Ref A). MMD President Levy Mwanawasa received support from only 23 percent of respondents, and UDA candidate Hakainde Hichilema came in third, with 17 percent. The coordinator of the network, Katongo Mulenga, claimed that the survey was conducted in every province of Zambia and the sample size was 4,000 respondents. However, no further details of the results or breakdowns by province are available. Mulenga is reportedly a researcher at the University of Zambia, but several Embassy contacts at the University's political science department tell us they have no knowledge of any individual with this name, nor are they familiar with the cited network of social science researchers. Post continues to have doubts about the credibility of this poll.

Anecdotal Feedback: Strong Support for Sata

¶ 18. (SBU) The head of one civil society organization that plans to field over 2,000 local election monitors told P/E Officers that monitors who were already tracking the candidates' appearances at campaign rallies reported strong enthusiasm in Kasama and elsewhere in the Northern Province for Michael Sata. Microbus drivers who support the PF candidate were offering free rides to Sata rallies and many voters were walking long distances to hear Sata speak. By contrast, the MMD has had to work hard and provide transport to entice voters to attend its rallies, he reported. Also, Sata has

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been happily mingling with the crowds and taking questions from voters, in marked contrast to President Mwanawasa, who is flown or driven to a site with great fanfare, delivers his remarks, and then makes a quick exit. The CSO representative shared an anecdote about a blind man who tried to query Mwanawasa about his plans to help the disabled--before he could even finish his question, security guards whisked him away and detained him, like a criminal. This approach has not helped the President's cause, the representative noted. He believed that Sata was gaining significant grassroots support all around Northern Province as a result of his accessible style and approach.

Interesting Demographic Notes from Pangolin Poll

¶ 19. (SBU) Prof. Simutanyi told us that Pangolin poll-takers collected much more demographic information from poll respondents than was divulged in the polling results report. For example, he noted that the typical MMD supporter tended to have less education than a typical Patriotic Front supporter. A greater number of MMD supporters had only a primary level education, while more PF supporters had completed secondary level studies, Simutanyi said. Although at first glance this seems counterintuitive, it actually reflects the MMD strategy of focusing on rural voters. Also, Sata reportedly receives a great deal of support in urban areas not only

from unemployed (and this does not equate with uneducated) young people, but also from skilled labor, who resent poor working conditions, and from civil servants, who are frustrated with long-delayed payments of benefits by the MMD government.

Pangolin Boss--Not Unbiased?

¶10. (SBU) Professor Simutanyi is a well-regarded political science professor from the University of Zambia who owns and runs Pangolin Consulting and writes a regular column in the independent daily newspaper, The Post. His column of September 25, 2006 was entitled, "Why I Won't Vote for Sata" and raised "grave misgivings" about Sata's suitability for the office of president. Regardless of the merit or truth in Simutanyi's statements about Sata, his public declaration raises concerns about the objectivity of the Pangolin polls. Simutanyi did not carry out the polling himself; his UNZA colleague, Njekwa Mate, was responsible for managing and overseeing the poll. Still, Simutanyi's public position creates an impression of bias, at a minimum.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) Opinion polling is a new phenomenon in Zambia. Despite what are probably good intentions, it is difficult to conclude that polls are being conducted objectively and accurately. As noted above, even respected academics are not without bias. The candidate who poses the most serious threat to President Mwanawasa, Michael Sata, has spent most of his time campaigning in Lusaka, Central, Copperbelt, Luapula and Northern provinces, and we expect that he will have a strong showing in these areas. Both Sata and Hichilema appear to have gained support during September, and this trend may continue right up until the election, at Mwanawasa's expense. We tend to agree with Prof. Simutanyi's view that it may be hard for Sata to prevail without stronger support in other provinces. But the race will be close. What impresses us is that although Mwanawasa's political advisors were likely pushing for an earlier election date in order to leave less time for campaigning (at a probable disadvantage to the opposition), Mwanawasa instead listened to the Electoral Commission of Zambia Chairperson, and based the date selection on his preference for holding a fair election and ensuring that sufficient time was allowed for necessary election preparations.

MARTINEZ